

Syrian Peace Process Support Group

Statement following the delegation to Aleppo and Damascus

From 10 to 12 March, a delegation of Members of the European Parliament from different political groups, Javier **Couso Permuy**, Tatjana **Zdanoka**, Yana **Toom**, Andrejs **Mamikins**, Fabio Massimo **Castaldo**, Stefano **Maullu** from the ***Syrian Peace Process Support Group*** visited Aleppo and Damascus with the aim of building bridges between the European Union and the Syrian government in order to promote an inclusive dialogue among the parties to the conflict, since a dialogue between all reliable parties is the only way to achieve a fair and lasting peace in Syria.

Following our visit, we would like to state the following:

- we encourage the European Parliament to resume and normalise relations with Syrian Parliament, elected representatives and authorities in order to promote an inclusive dialogue;
- we ask for the lifting of unilateral sanctions imposed by the EU against Syria which severely affect ordinary people and do not contribute to a real solution of the conflict;
- we emphasise that assistance from the EU towards the reconstruction of Aleppo and other areas heavily damaged during the conflict will be the best contribution towards an eventual return of Syrian refugees to their habitual living places;
- we were highly surprised by the statements of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in Aleppo and the local religious authorities that no EU humanitarian aid has reached either the city or other areas controlled by the Syrian government;
- we are convinced, especially after visiting the embassy of the Czech Republic in Damascus, that diplomacy never hurts, and that it is crucial to have first-hand information in order to analyse the conflict and contribute to a solution instead of staying on the side-lines; therefore we appeal to the EEAS and the EU Member States to restore diplomatic relations and to establish an EU mission in Syria;
- we highlight the importance of all the reconciliation efforts done by governmental institutions and appreciate the mediation role of the UN through his Special Envoy and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs we have visited in Damascus and recommend the EU to participate actively in the Reconciliation Process.

Debate in the European Parliament on this conflict has been insufficient, and we believe that it is highly important for such debate to take place in order to inform foreign policy decision-making; for this we need to have the information and the views of all parties to the conflict, excluding the terrorist groups.

When visiting the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs we were informed that the French Parliament will host a conference on Syria in April to which the Syrian deputy minister of Foreign affairs is invited. In order to move on from the practice of listening to only one side in the conflict, we call upon the European Parliament to invite representatives of the Syrian authorities to a debate.

Strasbourg, March 15, 2017